

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13
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SIL-01 EUR-12 ACDA-07 /105 W
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1171
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 047

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, SY
SUBJECT: EVIDENCE OF GROWING CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM APPEAL IN SYRIA

1. SUMMARY: TWO RECENT ELECTIONS IN SYRIAN PROFESSIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS AND ANOTHER INCIDENT IN HAMA SUGGEST GROWTH
IN CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM SENTIMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. SOURCES IN MEDICAL AND ENGINEERING PROFESSIONS
REPORT THAT GROWTH OF CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM SENTIMENT
EXPRESSING ITSELF ANEW IN POLITICAL FORM. ACCORDING TO
LOCAL DOCTOR, IN RECENT ELECTIONS
WITHIN SYRIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, BAATHIST CANDIDATES
LOST "ONE HUNDRED PERCENT" AND WERE REPLACED BY GROUP OF
CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS MUSLIM BRETHREN.
SOURCE SAID BAATHIST SETBACK DUE IN PART TO PARTY'S OVER-
CONFIDENCE AND RELIANCE UPON GROUP OF YOUNG PARTY OFFICIALS
IN ASSOCIATION WHO HAD NOT UNDERSTOOD MANIFOLD
WARNINGS OF LIKELY DEFEAT FOR PARTY'S CANDIDATES.
ACCORDING TO SOURCE, BAATHISTS SO SECURE IN THEIR
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EXPECTATION OF VICTORY THAT THEY NEGLECTED TO PREPARE
ALLIANCE WITH NEUTRAL CANDIDATES TO BOLSTER
BAATHI LISTS. NOW, HE NOTED, PARTY MUST DEAL WITH
OFFICIALS WHO ARE HOSTILE TO BAATHIST AIMS.

3. ANOTHER SOURCE INFORMED AMBASSADOR THAT SIMILAR

EVENT OCCURRED IN ELECTIONS AT DAMASCUS ENGINEERS' SYNDICATE. THIS SOURCE STATED THAT, ALTHOUGH HISHAM SATI, DIRGEN OF HOUSING AND PROMINENT BAATHIST, ELECTED TO PRESIDENCY OF SYNDICATE, CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS WON MOST OTHER SLOTS.

4. BRITISH EMBOFF TOLD US THAT FEW WEEKS AGO DEMONSTRATION TOOK PLACE IN HAMA AGAINST LOCAL BAATH PARTY OFFICE. HE OBTAINED INFO FROM "SOURCE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT EVENTS IN NORTH SYRIA." AND CHARACTERIZED IT AS LATEST IN SERIES OF DISTURBANCES GENERATED BY MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AGAINST REPRESENTATIVES OF BAATH PARTY.

5. COMMENT: INSTALLMENT OF CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS, MANY OF WHOM MAY BE MEMBERS OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, TO POSITIONS IN SYRIAN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IS A REMINDER OF THE BAATH PARTY'S TENUOUS HOLD OVER AFFECTIONS OF MANY SYRIANS. PROFESSIONALS HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN LESS COWED THAN SYRIAN CIVIL SERVANTS AND LABOR UNIONS BY THREATS AND ATTEMPTS TO RIG ELECTIONS. DOCTORS, ESPECIALLY, HAVE PLAYED KEY POLITICAL ROLE IN PAST, MOST RECENTLY THE PRE-ASAD BAATHI "REGIME OF THREE DOCTORS," ATASI, MAKHUS AND ZUAYYIN. THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS FOR THIS APPARENT RISE IN CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM SENTIMENT; EITHER THE BROTHERHOOD IS ENJOYING A GENUINE RENAISSANCE IN SYRIA OR THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES ARE VOTING FOR BROTHERHOOD CANDIDATES SIMPLY AS A PROTEST AGAINST BAATHI LEADERSHIP. NEITHER INTERPRETATION CAN BE ENCOURAGING TO BAATHI IDEOLOGUES.
MURPHY

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